

Civil Servants and the Crises of Minimum Wage: Gendered Analysis of Socio-Economic Challenges on Female Civil Servants in Nigeria

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Abstract

The issue of minimum wage across African nations has been a subject of intense debate, particularly concerning its adequacy in addressing the economic realities of civil servants. This study examines the crises of minimum wage implementation and its impact on female civil servants with a focus on Nigeria. The study is qualitative. Data are obtained from secondary sources and evaluated through content analysis. From the extant literature examined, the study underscores that while the Nigerian government has periodically reviewed and increased the minimum wage, inflation, currency depreciation, inconsistent implementation, and delays across states have significantly reduced its effectiveness in improving workers' living standards. Female civil servants, in particular, struggle with the rising cost of living, inadequate social welfare programs, and the dual responsibility of professional and domestic obligations, which disproportionately affect their well-being and work productivity in service. Employing Feminist Political Economy and Intersectionality theory, the study argues that wage inadequacies and delays deepen gender-based economic inequalities. Findings suggest that without a structured mechanism for regular wage reviews, enforcement of wage policies, and gender-sensitive economic reforms, female civil servants will continue to experience financial instability. The study recommends timely wage adjustments, stronger implementation policies, enhanced welfare programs, and gender-responsive economic strategies to improve the financial well-being of female civil servants. Addressing these issues is crucial for promoting economic equity and ensuring a sustainable livelihood for Nigeria's workforce.

Background to the Study

Adjusting and implementing the minimum wage has remained a controversial issue worldwide, especially in Africa and Nigeria, where civil servants rely on government salaries to make a living. Although there have been several pay reviews and modifications over the years, their efficacy has been severely weakened by ongoing delays, government noncompliance, particularly from subnational governments, and the rising cost of living (Guzi, 2021; Umenweke & Anushiem, 2024). Globally, minimum wage laws varied greatly, reflecting various social welfare programs, labor market configurations, and economic situations. Although some states and towns have raised their minimum wages, the federal minimum wage in developed nations like the US has been \$7.25 per hour since 2009 (Karim et al., 2023). On the other hand, countries like Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Luxembourg, and Germany guarantee higher living standards for their workers by offering some of the highest minimum salaries, which surpass \$15 per hour. With an average gross national income of \$35,810, Australia has the highest minimum wage in the world, at \$18.12 per hour (World Population Review, 2025). While nations like Sweden and Norway rely on collective bargaining instead of statutory minimum salaries, many European countries modify their minimum wages annually to keep up with inflation.

Many workers in developing nations continue to make less than a living wage because minimum salaries are frequently lower and inconsistently enforced. To lessen income inequality, nations like China, Brazil, and South Africa have attempted to raise minimum salaries progressively; nevertheless, obstacles including inflation and unorganized labor markets frequently prevent full adoption (Cho et al., 2013; Arnal & Förster, 2010). To guarantee fair compensation for workers everywhere, the global trend highlights the necessity of regular wage reviews, robust labor safeguards, and enforcement measures.

Nigerian workers have been fighting for a reasonable minimum wage since the colonial era when they started demanding higher pay and better working conditions. However, under President Shehu Shagari's administration, it was only in 1981 that Nigeria formally implemented its first national minimum wage. The government fixed the minimum wage at ₦125 per month in response to strong demands from labour organizations (Chinwendu & Edet, 2017). At the time, this was a historic accomplishment, but inflation and unstable economic conditions quickly reduced the value of workers' wages. Civil servants and other workers found it difficult to keep up with the growing cost of living, which prompted several industrial strikes and protests when the minimum wage was not reviewed regularly.

Under President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration, the Nigerian government raised the minimum salary to ₦5,500 for state employees and ₦7,500 for federal employees in 2000 in response to ongoing labour unrest (Bamidele, 2023). The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and other labour unions continued to protest as numerous state governments failed to endorse the new wage structure despite this increase. Following a string of statewide strikes, President Goodluck Jonathan made another major pay adjustment in

2011 by raising the minimum wage to ₦18,000 (Ofili & Prince, 2024; Shuaib, 2018). But when inflation kept rising, federal servants' purchasing power quickly decreased, leading to more calls for wage evaluations.

The wage was raised to ₦30,000 in 2019 under President Muhammadu Buhari, following extensive negotiations between the government and labour unions (Winny & Collins, 2024). However, implementation was uneven, with several state governments citing financial constraints as an excuse for non-compliance, and by 2023, inflation and the high cost of living had severely devalued the new wage, prompting calls for an upward review once again. The continued clamour to the government to work out a commensurate wage for workers due to the increased cost of living led to several negotiations between the government and the NLC. The outcome of these meetings resulted in the approval of ₦70,000 minimum wage for Federal workers per month with effect from May 1, 2024 (Tolu-Kolawole, 2024).

Labour unions continue to advocate for a living wage that reflects Nigeria's current economic realities, highlighting the need for a systematic and long-term approach to wage determination that guarantees equitable compensation for all workers, especially those in the civil service. According to reports, four months after the federal government approved the new minimum wage, some state governments had not yet implemented the new wage structure. Only a handful of states have executed the said increase or have only partially done so. This resulted in ongoing financial strain for workers, particularly female civil servants who frequently balance work obligations with additional household expenses and caregiving responsibilities. Specifically, a report from Vanguard News has it that some female civil servants in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) lamented the frustration they face as a result of the delay in the payment of the minimum wage increase (Vanguard, 2024). Although the increased minimum wage is insufficient, particularly in light of the current economic difficulties made worse by inflation, many states in Nigeria are yet to put into effect the wage change, further frustrating the lives of female workers.

It is in this regard that this study specifically focuses on minimum wage implementation and ordeals faced by female civil servants, especially in the event of current inflation-exacerbated economic hardship, and suggests policy solutions that would improve the welfare of Nigerian workers, particularly women, who are always most vulnerable to socio-economic event changes. Theories such as the Feminist Political Economy and Intersectionality provide a clearer understanding of how women continue to encounter inequality and marginalization in all facets of life including limited wages which further undermine their economic power and place them under double oppression.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Political Economy and Intersectionality theory are used in this study to examine the gendered minimum wage issue and the socioeconomic difficulties faced by female civil servants. With its roots in Marxist and socialist feminist traditions, the feminist political economy studies how labor market dynamics, economic structures, and policies

perpetuate gendered power disparities. Notable scholars such as Nancy Fraser, Heidi Hartmann, and Sylvia Federici, argue that economic inequality is shaped by the intersection of capitalism and patriarchy, especially in labor markets where women face structural disadvantages (Kongar & Berik, 2021; Stanislav, 2020). This viewpoint is crucial for comprehending how minimum wage laws, despite their intended purpose of ensuring financial stability, frequently fall short of addressing gendered differences in compensation and working conditions, particularly in the public sector.

The gender-neutral minimum wage rules in Nigeria are based on the idea that all workers experience the same financial circumstances. Feminist Political Economy, on the other hand, challenges this presumption by emphasizing how wage-setting systems consistently devalue occupations that are dominated by women. In contrast to male-dominated industries like engineering or security services, civil service positions in fields like education, healthcare, and social services, where women make up a sizable fraction of the workforce, frequently have lower pay scales. These meager pays are sometimes delayed, wage rises overdue and implementation of wage increases prolonged further exposing female civil servants to economic hardship.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's Intersectionality theory offers an additional crucial perspective for examining the complex issues that female civil servants encounter. According to this theory, class, ethnicity, and marital status are some forms of identity that influence gender oppression rather than its independent existence (Cho et al., 2013; Marecek, 2016). In Nigeria, women civil servants from underprivileged socioeconomic backgrounds especially widows, single mothers, or rural women face increased economic precarity. Cultural norms that force them to do unpaid caregiving duties at home, discriminatory employment practices, and restricted access to leadership roles all contribute to their poor pay experiences. Thus, intersectionality enables a more nuanced comprehension of how social and structural injustices interact to strengthen economic vulnerabilities.

One of the central claims of feminist political economy is that wage inequality is further entrenched by the neoliberal economic framework, which places a premium on cost-cutting and budgetary austerity (MacLeavy, 2024). Women in the civil service are disproportionately affected by the Nigerian government's reluctance to periodically raise the minimum wage because of financial limitations; their pay frequently stays the same despite inflation and growing living expenses. According to Fraser's theory of "recognition and redistribution," achieving economic justice requires addressing both the cultural value of female labor and material inequality (Lazzeri, 2009). This suggests that gender-sensitive minimum wage laws should include provisions to support women in historically undervalued occupations.

Furthermore, the Intersectionality theory clarifies how worker-supporting policies frequently fall short of meeting the unique demands of women. For instance, a lack of flexible work schedules, harassment at work, and insufficient maternity leave all contribute to the marginalization of female civil servants. Given that entrenched gender

biases in public administration as well as salary inequities, influence women's economic challenges, Crenshaw's theory regarding structural intersectionality is pertinent in this context. Implementing a national minimum wage policy ignores the particular economic realities faced by women in the workforce unless specialized actions are taken.

The lack of opportunity for career growth is another major issue Nigerian women civil servants face. Economic systems, according to feminist political economy researchers, favour male career progression while keeping women in lower-paying, less prominent positions (Bartlett, 2017). Promotion procedures in Nigeria's civil sector are frequently skewed toward men because of patriarchal working attitudes. Even when women join the workforce with comparable qualifications, they are often denied access to high-paying jobs due to this lack of upward mobility, which feeds the cycle of economic inequality.

Hence, a policy change based on intersectionality theory and feminist political economy is necessary to solve the socioeconomic difficulties faced by Nigerian women government workers. Wage improvements must acknowledge the systemic obstacles that maintain women's economic disadvantage and go beyond simple numerical changes. Pay parity, career mobility, and social protections like childcare assistance and anti-discrimination laws should all be incorporated into a gender-responsive minimum wage policy. Nigeria can progress toward a more equal public service structure that recognizes and tackles the particular challenges faced by female employees by incorporating these theoretical insights into policy frameworks.

Comparative Analysis of Minimum Wage Across African Countries

African nations' minimum wage regulations vary greatly from one another because of variations in inflation, labor legislation, and economic development. While some nations, like Egypt and Kenya, have national minimum wages that range between \$100 and \$150 per month, others, like South Africa, have set a relatively high minimum salary of R25.42 per hour (about \$1.30 per hour) to combat economic disparity. According to Muhammad et al. (2025), the national minimum wage for Egyptian private-sector workers rose from EGP 6,000.00 to EGP 7,000.00 per month in March 2025. This is equivalent to about \$138.50. The minimum wage's actual worth has decreased over time, notwithstanding prior increases. The minimum wage was increased by 50% to 6,000 pounds per month in February 2024. The equivalent amount was \$194 at the time. This drop is explained by rising inflation, which has been increasing since early 2022 after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which caused foreign investors to withdraw billions of dollars from Egyptian treasury markets (Muhammed et al., 2025).

Nigeria currently has one of the lowest minimum wages in West Africa. The current national minimum wage which took effect from May 1, 2024, is fixed at N70,000 per month (Tolu-Kolawole, 2024). The amount is equivalent to \$43.61. Owing to the current economic reality, this amount is too meager to meet family needs and demands and has been the reason for constant calls by government workers for increased wages due to a rise in living expenses. On a similar note, from January 1, 2024, Ghana's national

minimum wage rose from GHS 14.88 to GHS 18.15 per day. This wage rise is equivalent to \$1.17 (Mercans, 2025), although the minimum wage in nations like Morocco and Tunisia is marginally higher at more than \$200 per month. Other nations such as Ethiopia and Uganda, rely on sector-based wage agreements rather than having a nationally set minimum wage. A new rate of UGX 54,000 was discussed between the Ugandan government and the commercial sector in 2003, but no legislation was passed to put it into effect (Wambuga, 2016). Due to this, salary levels vary greatly throughout industries, with some workers making far less than their counterparts in other African countries. Since many workers, especially in the informal sector, make significantly less than the legal minimum wage, enforcement is still a major problem throughout the continent. Labor unions throughout Africa are fighting for regular wage adjustments to keep up with inflation and raise workers' standards of living.

The minimum wage in Cameroon has been reviewed multiple times. FCFA 41,875 per month, which is roughly \$70 per month and marginally more than Nigeria's, was last revised in 2023 from 36,270 CFA francs (roughly \$58). However, this amount is still insufficient to fulfill the necessities of many workers. Kenya also rates higher than Cameroon and Nigeria, with a minimum wage of KES 15,120 (\$116) per month in 2022 (Workforceafrica, 2025). Notwithstanding these variations, the incapacity of minimum salaries to keep pace with inflation and economic realities is a problem shared by several African nations. Some nations, like Nigeria and Ghana, have trouble with governmental compliance and enforcement, but South Africa has made progress in implementing its wage rules. Furthermore, many workers in countries like Rwanda and Cameroon, where informal employment is common, do not profit from legal wage standards. To guarantee that workers receive fair and livable wages regardless of their location, regular wage adjustments, more robust enforcement mechanisms, and expanded social protections are necessary.

The Gendered Impact of Wage Crises on Female Civil Servants

Although the wage issue in Nigeria's federal sector has affected many employees, female civil servants have been disproportionately affected. Women in the public sector still experience systemic disadvantages that increase their susceptibility to economic instability, even in the face of legislative frameworks designed to advance gender equality in the workplace (Klasen, 2019). Female employees, many of whom work in lower-paying civil service posts, are disproportionately impacted by inflation, wage stagnation, and the delayed implementation of minimum wage laws. These financial difficulties make it harder for female government workers to attain financial stability and career advancement, exacerbating already existing gender disparities.

Financial independence is one of the biggest effects of the pay crisis on female civil servants (Agboje, 2025). According to Kuzhabekova et al. (2018), women in civil service frequently have extra financial obligations, such as taking care of dependents, elderly family members, or children. Female civil servants find it difficult to meet their home financial obligations when their wages are not paid on time or do not keep up with the

rising cost of living. These employees experience additional psychological and emotional stress due to their inability to pay for fundamental needs like food, healthcare, and their children's education, which further impairs their general well-being and productivity at work (Travasso et al., 2014). Additionally, the wage crisis limits the prospects for career advancement for female civil servants by reinforcing gender gaps in the workplace. In the public sector, the majority of women work in lower-level administrative positions, where pay stagnation is particularly noticeable (Rodgers, 2024; Smith, 2015). Female employees are deterred from pursuing leadership roles by the absence of financial incentives and career mobility, which further maintains gender disparities in decision-making roles (Thelma & Ngulube, 2024). However, the gender pay gap in the civil service is growing as their male colleagues frequently have more access to promotions and other financial benefits (Eagly & Carli, 2018).

In addition to facing challenges in their finances and careers, female civil servants are disproportionately burdened with juggling work and home obligations. They frequently have to take on extra income-generating tasks outside of their regular employment due to their poor pay, which adds to their workload and leaves them with little time for personal or family obligations (Alemu et al., 2022). Their capacity to function well at work is further diminished by the detrimental effects of this "double burden" of professional and household responsibilities on their physical and mental well-being. These issues are made worse by the lack of gender-sensitive measures, such as flexible work schedules or childcare assistance, which hinder the professional success of female civil servants (Tendero, 2023).

For female civil servants, the ongoing salary crisis also has long-term economic repercussions, especially regarding financial planning and retirement security. Women's pension contributions and savings are frequently insufficient to support them after retirement because many of them work in the government sector and receive lesser pay and benefits (Fornero & Monticone, 2018). Their susceptibility to poverty is increased by their lack of financial stability in old age, especially in a nation with inadequate social security systems. Female civil servants are likely to experience financial difficulties even after they leave active duty if wage implementation and pension plans are not urgently changed.

Deliberate policy interventions that support wage equality, on-time salary payments, and career progression opportunities for women are necessary to address the gendered effects of wage crises on female government workers. The government must implement gender-sensitive economic reforms that acknowledge the unique financial difficulties faced by female workers and strictly enforce adherence to minimum wage laws (Papadavid, 2025). Initiatives like childcare facilities at work, leadership development programs for women, and financial support programs might further lessen the financial strains that female civil servants confront (Gugan et al., 2024). Nigeria may establish a more fair and inclusive civil service that recognizes and encourages the contributions of female employees by giving priority to reforms that would reduce their financial pressure, especially considering constant economic changes.

Rising Cost of Living and the Financial Struggles of Female Civil Servants in Nigeria

Workers in Nigeria are under tremendous financial strain due to the country's rising cost of living, especially female civil servants who frequently receive meager pay and shoulder additional household duties (Ndimele, 2022). Inflation over time has drastically lowered civil servants' purchasing power, making it challenging for them to pay for essentials like housing, food, healthcare, and education. According to Boushey (2016), the situation is much worse for female civil servants, many of whom balance financial responsibilities at home and work. Many women workers are struggling to pay their daily expenses due to wage adjustments that have not kept up with inflation, which has put them in a precarious financial situation (UN Women, 2013).

An interview conducted by Vanguard in 2024 within the FCT has it that many civil servants especially women expressed frustration over the delay in implementing the minimum wage increase. According to the report, one Mrs Maimuna Tijani said that “the delay in implementing the new minimum wage and the wage increase was frustrating and unfair. Civil servants are already struggling to make ends meet, and the government's failure to follow through on its promises only worsens the situation”. On a similar view, another female civil servant Mrs Lydia Dimka, a Nurse, also expressed discontent at the delay when she lamented thus, “The government has a history of delaying such promises. Unfortunately, it is the average worker who suffers the most, as inflation continues to rise while wages remain stagnant. I have had to take on extra shifts and some side jobs to supplement my income”. While Ms Chioma Ufodike held that “the delay was a clear indication that the government was out of touch with the realities faced by the average Nigerian worker. She further said that if the government understood the daily struggles, this wage increase would have been implemented immediately” (Vanguard, 2024).

These views by female workers indicate the frustration faced by female civil servants in the event of the current economic crises. These challenges manifest clearly in areas such as food security, housing affordability, healthcare services, and children's welfare among others. Food security is one of the most important areas where female civil servants are impacted by the rising cost of living. Inflation has caused the price of basic food products to soar, whereas public sector salaries have either stagnated or are frequently delayed (Disi et al., 2025). Female civil servants find it difficult to feed themselves and their children, especially if they are the main provider in their homes or are single parents (Akanle et al., 2016). They are frequently compelled to reduce the amount and quality of food they eat, which harms their health as well as the well-being and academic achievement of their kids.

Another significant financial hardship for Nigerian women civil servants is housing affordability. Many women in the civil service struggle to afford suitable housing, particularly in large cities, as a result of rising rents and increased urbanization. People who are unable to pay high rent are compelled to live in subpar or far-off housing, which results in expensive and time-consuming commutes to work. The dearth of reasonably

priced government housing programs for public employees exacerbates this issue, making many female employees more susceptible to financial strain and housing challenges (Williams, 2004).

The growing cost of medical services and pharmaceuticals has also made healthcare costs a significant worry for female government workers. Government healthcare programmes are available to certain public personnel, but they are frequently insufficient, leading many women to turn to much more costly private healthcare. For female employees who are in charge of the health and welfare of their children, aging parents, or other family members, the financial burden of medical bills is especially severe. Female civil servants may not be able to pay for essential medical care when their earnings are delayed or insufficient, endangering both their own and their dependents' health.

Additionally, the cost of school has increased, making it more challenging for female government workers to give their kids a good education. Due to inadequate facilities and learning resources in many public schools, parents are forced to send their kids to expensive private schools (Heyneman & Stern, 2014). Many female civil servants find it difficult to pay for their education due to stagnant income and growing tuition costs; they occasionally turn to loans or unofficial credit systems (Ghosh, 2021). Their incapacity to provide their kids with a good education restricts social mobility and feeds the circle of economic suffering.

Conclusion

The study aimed to examine the challenges of minimum wage implementation and its impact on female civil servants with a focus on Nigeria. It revealed that the Nigerian government has periodically reviewed and increased the minimum wage, inflation, currency depreciation, inconsistent implementation, and delays across states have significantly reduced its effectiveness in improving workers' living standards. Female civil servants, in particular, struggle with the rising cost of living, inadequate social welfare programs, and the dual responsibility of professional and domestic obligations, which disproportionately affect their well-being and work productivity in service. There is an urgent need for economic and policy solutions to alleviate these financial difficulties. The Nigerian government must make sure that changes to the minimum wage are made following inflation rates and promptly applied in every state (Innocent, 2017). To assist female public officials and lessen their financial obligations, social assistance programs, subsidized housing, and reasonably priced healthcare services should be increased.

Recommendations

1. The government should make sure that any increases in the minimum wage are swiftly applied in all states and industries. Salary increases are ineffective at alleviating the financial difficulties that civil servants, especially women, confront when wage changes are delayed.
2. More robust regulations should be established to ensure that employers in the private sector and state governments are held responsible for enforcing the

- national minimum wage. The federal government should set up monitoring systems to guarantee compliance and impose sanctions for non-compliance.
3. The government should establish a system for regular wage reviews in light of Nigeria's erratic economic circumstances. This would protect civil servants from experiencing financial hardship by ensuring that wages reflect the growing cost of living and keep up with inflation.
 4. Priority should be given to policies that enhance the financial security of female civil servants. To address the particular financial difficulties experienced by women in the workforce, areas such as career progression possibilities, childcare services at work, and tailored financial support programmes should be looked into.
 5. In addition to pay increases, the government ought to fund programs for free or low-cost education, subsidized housing, and accessible healthcare for civil servants and their families. For female employees, these policies would reduce financial strains and raise general living standards.

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